Galway’s Young Coders use their Digital Skills to Raise Awareness of Marine Issues

Press Release: August 2016

Thirteen young Irish people were honoured for their work in creating innovative digital games and stories based on the health of the ocean at the Sea Change CoderDojo Challenge, which was held in the National University of Ireland Galway (NUI Galway), in Ireland in summer 2016.

The Sea Change game design challenge was launched on 27 February 2016 and invited entrants between the ages of 7 – 18 from Galway (Ireland) to use their coding skills to highlight issues facing our ocean. The challenge was organised by NUI Galway as part the EU-funded Sea Change project which aims to change the way European citizens view their relationship with the sea, by empowering them to take sustainable action towards a healthy ocean and ultimately a healthy planet.

Dr Anthony Grehan, Senior Researcher, NUI Galway and co-organiser of the event said: “The challenge was to use the fun and popularity of designing and playing tech games to raise awareness of marine issues like the need to protect cold-water coral reefs, ways to address the scourge of microplastics, and how we can maintain a healthy ocean, for ourselves, for marine life, and for the planet.”

Ciara Heanue from Ballyconneely, Co Galway, won the Irish Junior Award for her ‘Wildlife Awareness’ game. Ciara received a prize of €300 which was donated by Irish Sea Change partners AquaTT and NUI Galway. Her game will be included in an iBook about cold-water corals that will be presented to secondary schools as a teaching resource.

The joint winners of the Irish Senior Award were Conor Salmon and Liam Forde for ‘Gully’s Clean-up’, and Adam Gallagher, Evan Thornton and Daniel Bradley Coyne for ‘Flappy Fish’. The senior winners shared a cash prize of €500.

Due to the high standard at Junior level, three Junior Merit Awards were presented to: Sean Connolly, Ruan O’Dowd and Diarmuid O’Donoghue for their ‘Save My Sea’ game; Paul Schuler, Michael Salmon and Liam Ferrie for ‘SOS - Save Our Seas!’; and Sean Kerr for ‘Animal Saver’.

Dr Veronica McCauley from the School of Education at NUI Galway and co-organiser of the event said: “The surge of interest, with 32 entrants from Galway alone, revealed a strong and enthusiastic coding community, which is particularly relevant considering the 2015-2020 Digital Strategy for Schools and its promotion of coding and programming at both primary and secondary levels of education in Ireland.”

The game design was reviewed by a panel of experts: Alan Duggan (Tribalcity.com), Gavin Duffy (RealSim Ltd.) and Triona Mac Giolla Rí (Aro Digital Strategy) and judged on ‘best concept’ and ‘ease of use’. The judges sponsored €50 vouchers for the three merit awards.

“The aesthetic and technical merit of the project submissions has been highly commended by the judges,” said Brendan Smith, Education Outreach Officer at INSIGHT, NUI Galway and Co-Founder of CoderDojo Galway.
The marine-themed games are now available at www.seachangeproject.eu/futureocean. Other marine related resources are available on the project website: www.seachangeproject.eu.

Notes for Editors

The Sea Change project is funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement n° 652644. The project began in March 2015 and will run until February 2018. The Marine Biological Association, UK is coordinating the project. AquaTT is the project dissemination partner.

CoderDojo is a worldwide movement of free, volunteer-led, community-based programming clubs for young people. Anyone aged seven to seventeen can visit a Dojo where they can learn to code, build a website, create an app or a game, and explore technology in an informal, creative, and social environment.

Dr Anthony Grehan is a conservation biologist with over 20 years of experience of working in the deep-sea. Over the last decade, Dr Grehan has focused on the field of cold water coral ecology, conservation and sustainable resource management, developing urgent and robust outreach and science/policy initiatives in a number of large EU Framework Programme projects: ACES, HERMES, PROTECT, HERMIONE, Clamer, CoralFISH.

Dr Veronica McCauley is a lecturer in Science Education who has extensive science outreach experience. Her Hook Series offers science educators a collection of videos that capture novel and engaging aspects of each science topic. The complete collection includes six iBooks to support science teachers, three in English and three in the Irish language.

Also present at the award ceremony were Deputy Mayor of Galway City, Councillor John Walsh and Chairman of CoderDojo Galway City, Dr Karl Sweeney.

For press queries, please contact the project Communications Officer:

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Winner of the Irish Junior Entrant Award, Ciara Heanue, being presented with her prize by Gavin Duffy, RealSim Ltd. and Dr Veronica McCauley, Science Education Lecturer, School of Education, NUI Galway, for her game 'Wildlife Awareness'.